HOME CULTURES VOLUME 9, ISSUE 3 PP 303–328

KATE PAHL

EVERY OBJECT TELLS A STORY

Intergenerational Stories and Objects in the Homes of Pakistani Heritage Families in South Yorkshire, UK

KATE PAHL IS READER IN LITERACIES IN EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD. HER RESEARCH INTERESTS ARE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LITERACY, WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON LITERACY PRACTICES WITHIN FAMILIES; NARRATIVES AND ARTIFACTS IN HOMES AND MUSEUMS; CREATIVITY AND LITERACY; AND MULTILINGUALISM, LITERACY AND ETHNOGRAPHY. SEVERAL OF HER RESEARCH PROJECTS HAVE RECEIVED FUNDING THROUGH THE AHRC'S CONNECTED COMMUNITIES PROGRAM.

ABSTRACT The article considers objects and stories within the homes of Pakistani Heritage families who came from Pakistan to the UK in the 1950s and 1960s. The research team particularly explored the relationship between objects and family stories and timescales. Part of the research process involved an ethnographic inquiry exploring the stories told by the families. An exhibition was constructed from these stories and a website. The experience of migration, of the resettling of people and objects produced new kinds of stories in relation to objects, as families moved across national and transnational spaces. I highlight how a nuanced understanding of timescales can help illuminate studies of

HOME CULTURES DOI: 10.2752/175174212X13414983522152

home cultures of migrant families. Notions of place and space are disrupted when possessions are left behind, and language is all there is left to recreate lost objects in old spaces. Longer timescales can be attached to objects that appear valueless when actual objects are lost or in transit. By making the timescales a focus for discussion, actual stories and experiences of families making that transition can be more readily heard. Home cultures can be understood in this context as "traveling" and subject to transformation and disruption.

KEYWORDS: homes, objects, stories, South Asian cultures, migration, museums, ethnography

> Researcher: And you also talked about an old suitcase?
>
> RK: Yes, mum's, I do believe she has still got it, I will ask her. I remember very vividly as a child this brown leather suitcase with all these labels on it, I assume they had labels at that time, they weren't the kind you could take off, and mum saying dad had used it for several years and this is all the places he had gone to—I think she's got it somewhere. (Interview RK, Rotherham, South Yorkshire, UK)

INTRODUCTION

Within homes, objects circulate and sometimes settle for decades in one place, or are misplaced and become lost. People who have resettled in new homes experience objects anew in the context of new places. For example, the name for an object might have changed, or its use or meaning. However, the pull on the object can vary; from a very long timescale attached to an object stretching over generations to a much shorter one that makes the object seem more ephemeral and less valuable. It is significant that this object can carry the same "weight" of importance in a narrated story if required to do so. A consideration of timescales as applied to everyday objects creates questions about the weighting attached to objects and whether it is possible to classify objects in homes by the same criteria as external classification systems, such as within museum collections. The translation of objects from home to museum exhibition can make this process more visible and contested (Macdonald 2003).

The purpose of this article is to consider objects in the home in relation to timescales and the stories family members told about these objects. The study of material objects is established within a number of disciplines such as social anthropology and sociology

(Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Hoskins 1998; Miller 2001, 2008, 2010). The relationship between objects and stories in the home has been explored by Hurdley (2006), who looked at the way in which objects could be differently represented in different stories. The representation of home objects, she argued, is mediated by the way in which they are displayed and the narratives told about them. Objects relate both to the display practices that circulate around them, and the space they are placed in, but also to the timescales attached to the object. Space and time, taken together, are relevant lenses that help us understand the meanings and uses of objects in the home. By taking a cultural materialist approach to objects in the home, these objects become the focus of study, alongside the narratives told by the people who inhabit the home.

Here, I consider the role of time in narrative as related to objects and the way in which memory constructs and sustains particular stories about objects in relation to certain timescales and not others. I engage with the literature on social memory (Connerton 1989, 2009; Fentress and Wickham 1992), as well as recognizing the way in which memories are sometimes erased or destroyed over time (Connerton 2009; Samuel and Thompson 1990). These dissonances are useful as a lens from which to view stories in the home as both fractured and then dialogically or partially reconstructed in particular sites and spaces (Tolia-Kelly 2004). The concept of sensory memory can then be used to describe the ways in which notions of "home" are re-experienced both through embodiments but also through entanglements with objects and spaces (Pink 2004, 2009).

Timescales as attached to objects can be experienced in different ways in the context of migration. Jay Lemke (2000) discussed the issue of timescales in relation to artifacts, where he argued that "every process, action, social practice or activity occurs on some timescale," but that "it is the relative timescale" that determines the interdependence of these processes, and in particular in relation to the circulation of semiotic artifacts (2000: 275). A focus on the circulation of objects in homes and their relationship to timescales can be a heuristic device from which to understand the nature of migration. In particular, Lemke suggests, it is important to consider the effect of *heterochrony*, in which "a long timescale process produces an effect in a much shorter timescale activity" (2000: 280). When this idea is applied to objects in the home, it is possible to question settled conceptions of time in relation to objects in home settings. I also propose to unite this understanding with a recognition and discussion about the spaces from which these objects have traveled (Massey 2005). As Werbner (1990) has investigated, South Asian settlers who came from Pakistan to the North of England in the 1950s and 1960s, drawn by the promise of improved living standards and jobs in the steel industry and manufacturing, invested objects with new significance and placed these objects in new contexts. This process of migration then

placed objects in different relations to each other, and Werbner identified how "objects take on new meanings as signifiers of taste, status and distinction" (1990: xv). Much of this shift is in relation to memory. Tolia-Kelly (2004), in her study of South Asian women's landscapes, explores how we carry around a "portmanteau of cultural memory" (2004: 286) to store memories. This can be understood as being a place "where domestic cultures create a set of historical narratives which act as both a store of refractive memorials of past stories and gateways to body memories" (Tolia-Kelly 2004: 286). Here, I explore in more detail that portmanteau of cultural memory in order to describe the way in which objects in the home can be used to recreate past memories but also be employed to engage with an everyday aesthetic with shorter timescales, embedded within a sensory experience of the home (Pink 2004).

In this context, I consider the literature on postcolonialism and particularly the literature about the experience of South Asians in the UK (Ali *et al*. 2006; Tolia-Kelly 2004; Werbner 1990). These authors describe the postcolonial experience to be about a complex sense of "home" that crosses continents. This sense of "home" and process of re-engagement with a space engages with contemporary realities in moments of "difference" as well as developing new landscapes, materialities, and identities in the process. Tolia-Kelly has described how South Asians experience a "fluid citizenry" from the geographical mobility through other national landscapes, also governed by the British under colonial rule (2004: 277). The family described in the present study migrated over a period of time to the UK, but also, as described above, spent time in New York, Kuwait, and Indo-China along the way. This complexity can be traced within the everyday cultural lives of the families and was articulated in the image of the suitcase (Figure 1). Objects themselves can be a "contact zone" (Clifford 1997) between two kinds of experiences across cultures and can acquire new meanings in the new setting. Studies of objects in homes have seen objects as tracers of identity narratives (Shankar 2006) and as mediators of identity as retold and displayed in narratives (Hurdley 2006). Miller (2008) has traced "the comfort of things" for families who live in new spaces, where "home" is thousands of miles away. The experience of migration, of the resettling of people and objects, produces new kinds of stories in relation to objects, as settlers move across cultural spaces. The importance of studying the materialities of the homes of new migrants has been discussed, for example, by Savaş (2010); in particular, she has explored how taste as something formed in the process of displacement (2010: 316) can operate as a way of understanding how people come to choose certain objects over others as a marker for identity in a new context. In this study, I focused on three generations of one family, and in particular looked at how the objects chosen for discussion reflected identities and narratives told over time about the family. Below, I describe the project and

Figure 1
Image of art work by Zahir Rafiq depicting a suitcase with labels representing the different countries to which the family members have travelled.

the processes by which the team (Andy Pollard, Kate Pahl, and Zahir Rafiq) collected the stories about the objects in the homes.

FAMILY OBJECTS

Objects, for this family, could stand for family migrations. In the opening quote above, the respondent, Ruksana [pseudonym] described an old suitcase her mother remembered as a child. This suitcase symbolized the journey the family had taken from the Pathan regions of Pakistan to South Yorkshire. Ruksana also mentioned various mementos of their father's travels around East Asia, Hong Kong, and within the UK. The suitcase was never found, but its story was represented in a piece of art by Zahir Rafiq and the remembered suitcase was evoked as an object that, while not present in a material form, became one of the key parts of the exhibition as an evocation of Ruksana's father's life.

The interview was part of a series of ethnographic interviews that two researchers, Kate Pahl and Andy Pollard, undertook as part of an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded project on narratives of migration and objects in the Pakistani communities of Rotherham, funded by the AHRC's Diasporas Migration and Identities Research program. The interviews were done with a group of families in a single area, yet the article focuses on one family in particular. The aim of the research project was to create an exhibition of these objects from the stories the families told about their objects. The research question was: what kinds of family stories can be found, and described, in connection with specific artifacts, produced in home settings in the context of experiences of migration?

The project was a collaboration between Ferham School, Rotherham Central Sure Start, the Clifton Park Museum, Rotherham, with researchers from the University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam

University and a designer, Zahir Rafiq, funded by Creative Partnerships, which created the website and advised the project team. The project was carried out in community contexts, and a family learning dimension was important in involving local women to create art in a local children's center. This provided a wider community context as well as the focus on exhibition with the core families. The resulting exhibition was displayed in a local art gallery in South Yorkshire in April 2007 and ran for one month. Subsequently, the designer developed the project into a website called Every Object Tells a Story, and a learning resource pack was created as a result of the exhibition and research project (see www.everyobjecttellsastory.org.uk).

Here, I consider data from one particular family, the Ks. This family included a grandmother and four grown-up children, all of whom also had children who ranged in age from very young to teenagers. They all lived in Rotherham, but some had moved out from the family home in the Ferham area. The interviews took place in the family's homes over a period of six months, were extended, ethnographic and, in many cases, were repeated two or three times to produce dense accounts of family migration and experience. We focused on four siblings who themselves had children. Their children also participated in the project and lent their toys to the exhibition. We asked about the family's history, their experiences of growing up in the UK, and, in the case of the grandparents, in Pakistan, and explored the family's special objects and stories from the perspective of three generations. While the grandmother was still alive, the elder Mr K had passed away. The interviews yielded themes, which, when coded and related back to the interviews, became the starting point for the construction of the museum cases. The process of interview coding was also collaborative, with codes taken back to the family members to check interpretations. These thematic interpretations then became linked to objects, which could be grouped by the themes in the exhibition, eventually emerging as "gold," "textiles," "education," "travel," "weddings," and "toys."

Figure 2 shows the process of coding the interviews and developing the clusters of themes that became display cases in the exhibition:

The process of coding and discussing the interviews enabled the research team to create a kind of reciprocal analysis (Campbell and Lassiter 2010) in which the process of remembering the objects and talking about them evoked further analytic insights. In this article, I embark on a process of reconstructing that analytic reflection as I describe the objects that were important to the families. The recursive process of my remembering links to the way in which the families remembered objects, or described those that were lost, reenacting their presence in the interviews with us over time.

THE WORLD OF OBJECTS

The world of objects is the space where children grow up and where adults come to know the world anew (Bourdieu 1990). The interviews

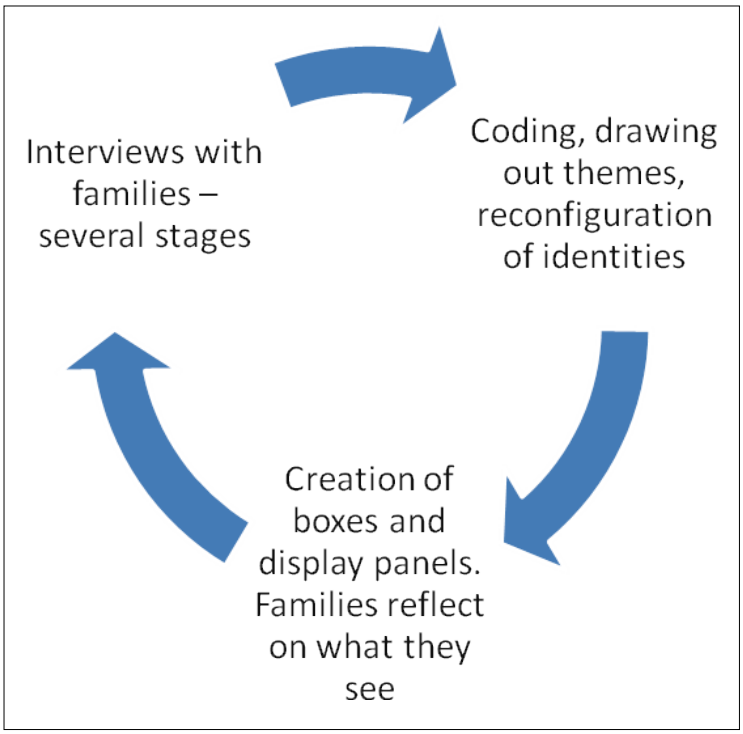

Figure 2
Interview coding.

were specifically to find out what kinds of objects were important to South Asian families who had migrated to South Yorkshire in the 1950s and 1960s. At that time, South Yorkshire was rich in job opportunities in the steel industry, and many Pakistani men came over, initially with a temporary aim of gaining employment to send money back to Pakistan. However, as their lives progressed, their wives often came to join them, and during the 1960s in South Yorkshire a large number of families made their homes in places like Rotherham, Sheffield, and Bradford (see, for example, Ali *et al*. 2006; Ballard 2006; Basit 1997; Werbner 1990). While the majority came from the Mirpuri regions of Pakistan, some also came from the borders with Afghanistan, the Pathan regions. These people, like the family interviewed for this project, spoke Pushtu, the language of the Pashtun group. In the case of the K family, the elder Mr K (now passed away) emigrated in the 1950s and, after a period of traveling backwards and forwards, settled in South Yorkshire and brought his wife over. He then brought up his four children in the area where he settled, a quiet area called Ferham, in Rotherham. His children helped him build a house in Pakistan and he returned frequently to make sure he also had a stake in the village where he grew up.

The project team worked with Mr M's four grown-up children to find out which objects were special to them and why. The curator aimed

to turn these objects into an exhibition. However, when it came to creating the exhibitions, many of the objects described in the family's narratives were lost, disappeared, so were replicated through existing museum collections. One of the emerging key findings from the interview process was the way in which objects with the same kinds of associations became associated with new practices.

To understand this, we may consider Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) concept of "habitus" as a set of acquired and enduring dispositions. Habitus can be understood as a system of structuring structures in which everyday life and people engage with the field of practice (Bourdieu 1990). In a discussion with Loïc Wacquant, Bourdieu expanded on the habitus as being a "product of history, it is an *open system of dispositions* that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures. It is durable but not eternal!" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 133; emphasis in the original). Habitus, as "embodied history," is itself a word used to describe the embodiment of practice (Bourdieu 1977). Within the habitus, arrangements in the home are spatially and temporally constructed: "The world of objects, a kind of book in which each thing speaks metaphorically of all others and from which children learn to read the world, is read with the whole body, in and through the movements and displacements which define the space of objects as much as they are defined by it" (Bourdieu 1990: 76).

Objects sit within the structuring structures of the habitus and their materiality is read by children as they grow up within the "idea" of the home (Douglas 1991). However, the acquired dispositions that shape the habitus can shift as migration forces people outside these structures. Within recent literature, a focus has emerged on the way in which the habitus is transformed or adapted in new settings and the moment of improvisation of the habitus as it falls out into new generations (Holland *et al*. 2001; Savaş 2010). Holland *et al*. describe these improvisations as follows:

> Improvisations are the sort of impromptu actions that occur when our past, brought to the present as habitus, meets with a particular combination of circumstances and conditions for which we have no set response. Such improvisations are the openings by which change comes about from generation to generation. They constitute the environment or landscape in which the experience of the next generation "sediments," falls out, into expectation and disposition. (Holland *et al*. 2001: 18)

In this article, I focus on stories about objects as a site of improvisations. Objects in this study can be seen to be the site of the transformation of the habitus (Bourdieu 1977) and their redefinition by the families within the space of Rotherham can be traced within their narratives. The habitus, consequently, is transformed according to

the new surroundings (Appadurai 1996), and temporal associations can shift radically in new contexts. Appadurai identified how "patina" can denote high status, in a particular context, but in another context, "patina" will not signify much: "The distinction between an heirloom and junk is not patina as such, but also the successful semiotic management of the social context" (Appadurai 1996: 76). While "patina" can denote an aristocratic lifestyle (e.g. in the stately home), it can, in a different context, denote worthlessness. Thus, social context can shift the meaning of an object, and its apparent timescale, so that an object in one context, Pakistan, can become a significantly different object in the new context, in this case, the UK. Below I explore this dissonance in more detail.

TIMESCALES AND OBJECTS

In the homes where I visited, the effect of migration was that objects slipped from one particular contextual framing to another. This meant that in the narratives, as we listened to people's stories, we noticed the way in which their meanings shifted across the spaces of Pakistan and England. In particular, I look at the concept of *heterochrony*, where a long timescale process produces an effect in a much shorter timescale activity (Lemke 2000). The understanding of heterochrony derives from the notion of the chronotope, as outlined by the literary theorist Bakhtin (1981). Bakhtin described chronotopes as a kind of "organising principle" in relation to novels and to narrative: "Chronotopes are central to the meanings that people construct about their worlds. They are the organizing centres for the fundamental narrative events of the novel. The chronotope is the place where the knots of the narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative" (Bakhtin 1981: 250).

The concept of heterochrony disrupts this sequential process. Lemke, considering the role of timescales in institutional settings, saw the effect of heterochrony as disrupting the onset of sequential "narrative time" and, in particular, he looked at the way in which the use of an object with a shorter timescale disrupted the process of recognition of the action linked to the object. Lemke (2000) described this in relation to a Samurai sword used for beheading an offending commoner:

> Ready to hand in such a situation is the storied and sacred family sword, passed down from father to son for centuries, lovingly polished and razor-sharp. But the samurai reaches instead for a much less ready-to-hand, common and ordinary battle sword, not nearly so well balanced or well kept, to decapitate the offender. A years-long historical process of cumulating meaning and value envelops the heirloom sword, but this long-term process intersects with and determines action in a very

> short-term event. The material object itself, the sword, functions in these processes, both long-term and short-term, not simply through its material affordances—the heirloom sword will do just as well or better to cut off a head and is already in hand—but also through the meaning and value it bears. The samurai acts in the situation, not just in relation to present events and material relations, but also in relation to his interpretation of the appropriateness of using the sword and to his own education in the traditions of his family and culture—a process on a timescale intermediate between that of the sword's history and the present event. (Lemke 2000: 280)

Lemke's insight that timescales varied in relation to objects and that this variation affects the meanings and contexts of present action enabled us, as interviewers, to explore with the family members the context that surrounds an object, its history, in relation to its use and timescale of use. What emerged from the interviews was an understanding of the moment in which an object is made meaningful and that moment could be within a short timescale (two to three weeks) or a very long timescale stretching back over several generations. Paying attention to these timescales in family narratives can alert us to the role of intergenerational meanings in framing objects in the home as well as reminding us of the processes of disruption and reimagining that also occurs in relation to home objects in migrating families. Certain objects can be also identified as "boundary objects" (Lemke 2000: 281). These boundary objects can be studied as signs of disruption or dislocation.

When we conducted the interviews in the homes, we looked at how the family members narrated the objects in relation to time. We then considered these narratives in relation to time and space. Modernist notions of time as a processual, sequential concept have been disrupted by postmodern and postcolonial accounts of time as contested, fractured, and often recursive, as people move and find themselves within new contexts and spaces (Chukuwudi Eze 2008). This insight into the disruptions produced by postcolonialism provided a way of understanding the recursive nature of narrative but also the way in which new kinds of narratives emerge from the old. The concept, from Ricoeur (1980), of the spiraling nature of memory can be used to describe this process. A family might tell a story passed down from grandfather to father to son, and at the same time recontextualize it for a new generation. Ricoeur argued that the relationship between time and narrative is dialectical, and that the recursive nature of storytelling disrupts historical time: "Memory, therefore, is no longer the narrative of external adventures stretching along episodic time. It is itself the spiral movement that, through anecdotes and episodes, brings us back to the almost motionless constellation of potentialities that the narrative retrieves" (Ricoeur 1980: 186).

The concept of the spiral can also be applied to the changing nature of home narratives and interpretations of objects, as these interpretations were constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed over the process of doing the interviews. Time is something that is subjectively constructed and a cultural phenomenon (Knights 2006). Knights suggested that human life and the social actions that constitute it are a complex overlap of actions and meanings at various stages of enactment. When doing ethnography, in everyday practice time is diverse, incorporating relational, cyclical, processual, as well as individual and linear aspects (Knights 2006).

To analyze the objects, I focused on this concept of short and long timescales. I describe objects with a very short-term timescale attached to them, such as a pair of gold-sprayed elephants, which were very much a part of a decorating scheme. Then I consider longer-term items, such as a gold watch, given to the father as a present. This then leads back to stories of the enduring value of gold. In all of this, the circulating stories were attached both to the enduring value of gold in the Pashtun cultural spaces in Pakistan, but also to the much more contemporary notion of gold as encapsulated in the concept of "bling" (Pahl and Pollard 2008). Timescales, then, can be compressed, when stories themselves have been located with different experiences, across different continents.

GOLD OBJECTS

A set of stories on the subject of gold, circulating among the family members, will illustrate this concept. One of the sons, J, told this story several times, and the family members all told me the story of their father's father, who went to New York and came back with his money in his shoes:

> The story goes that he put the money in his shoes, he had little shoes built where he could hide the gold because people would steal from you when you slept on the boat, or the train, you know, it was a great difficulty, and carrying cash on you, I mean it's difficult now but in them days, he brought whatever he had back, he came all the way back to Pakistan, India, and looked after his family there. (Interview JK, September 2006)

This grandfather had made his money "shining shoes on the sidewalk in the middle of New York, and he ended up making a fortune just doing that" (interview, Ruksana, September 2006).

The grandfather's shoes were, however, lost, although one of the family members recalled seeing them "sitting on the cellar steps," and the shoes had to be recreated from the museum stores for the exhibition case (Figure 3). The shoes were lost, but the story of the shoes continued to circulate and inform family histories, and the connection with America continues to fascinate the family to this day.

Figure 3
Display case on the theme of travel.

Exploring more deeply the theme of gold led to an understanding of how heterochrony could be understood within narratives linked to objects. Gold was a recurring theme in the family stories. Ruksana told me,

> As regards gold, culturally a girl is always given gold when she gets married as well as looking nice, because you wear the gold with your outfit, your wedding outfit, it is for a rainy day as well in case anything happens and you go, oh we'll sell the gold, not only are you given gold, you are given other things in the dowry, and that is like your part of your inheritance from your parents so you kind of take your inheritance with you when you get married. (Interview, Ruksana, September 2006)

However, her own focus on gold was more connected to her interior design interests. She showed me some polystyrene elephants in her house that she had sprayed gold: "I always have gold spray in the house and I decided to spray the elephants because they were just cream and they didn't match my candlesticks and I decided to spray them gold (laughs)" (interview, Ruksana, September 2006).

The temporal importance of gold (handed down, long-term value) contrasted with the short-term beauty of the sprayed elephants. Here, it is possible to see the effect of heterochrony (Lemke 2000) whereby

Figure 4
Display case on the theme of gold.

something associated with long-term timescales (gold jewelry) becomes instead something that is experienced within a short-term timescale (gold spray) but connects through association with the long-term timescale (see Figure 4). When we discussed the associations with Ruksana herself, she linked her interest in interior design to her focus on aesthetics through her work as a wedding-set designer. She did acknowledge, however, the links the aesthetics of "gold" had with the enduring values that lay behind it and linked to much longer timescales.

Studies (e.g. Werbner 1990) have looked at the importance of the gift in Pakistani wedding ceremonies. However, here the aesthetic and sensory qualities of the gold elephants were as important to Ruksana as her wedding gold, which was not as visible or as much enjoyed as her gold spray. For her, the sensory properties of "gold" are about her home and her aesthetic appreciation of home. A "complex web" of diasporic relations was displayed through the materiality and aesthetics of her home (Savaş 2010: 313). These aesthetic categories were informed through visits to Egypt and the "shared aesthetic order" that Ruksana gained from that experience (Savaş 2010: 324). This order was temporal and linked to the recent experience of gold spray, as Ruksana says she "always has gold spray in the house."

The concept of "gold" cast a long shadow over the family stories. Gold had intrinsic qualities, associated with heaviness and value, as this interview with one of the family members shows:

> I gave him a watch that I brought for him from Kuwait, he said he wanted a nice watch so I bought one for him … It's very thin and it's a Seiko watch and it's got a golden chain. It was a nice watch that I bought for him at that time. He wore it, you know, he used to wear it, but he said, "I want a heavy watch, this is a bit too

> thin," you know, but he used to wear it. So that's the watch that I have inherited from him. (Interview, AK, August 2006)

Gold also had a new association, as one of the family members ironically joked to the researchers: "Bling—the Asians introduced that to the country" (interview, Z). The resulting "gold case" produced for the exhibition was a constructed space that brought together objects with different timescales and associations, but in a new configuration of object and ideas.

With diaspora communities, objects might take on different meanings across different contexts and spaces. Exploring this idea further, it is possible to see how this lens can allow for the questioning of a settled notion of history and continuous timescales. Identities as described by research participants were experienced as traveling (Macdonald 2003), and stories shifted alongside objects. An account of the family that focused on a single place, Rotherham, say, or Pakistan, was no longer useful in understanding the relationship between the objects and the stories. The families described coming from territories that were still under dispute; the northwestern territories in Pakistan remain contested, and the Pashtun regions where this family originated, remain on the Afghan border, near Taliban heartlands. The family, now settled in Rotherham and identified strongly as British Asian, struggled to define this "in-between" identity. As one of the informants said, "with Asians, our families are torn between two continents, between two lifestyles, between different cultures and you have sort of these feelings walking about, like as an identity thing, it is not a crisis of identity, almost a conflict, is it a fusion, or sometimes it's a conflict, of identity" (interview, JK, November 2006).

In this situation, language is where the experience is located. Historical accounts vary. Writers on postcolonialism recognize this, raising the question, "to what extent are time and history, themselves, material artifacts of concepts and language?" (Chukuwudi Eze 2008: 37). The stories looked backward and forward at the same time. Time was both reconstructed and deconstructed anew across generations in the families' narratives.

LOST OBJECTS

The process of migration also led to a new relationship to material culture, and these shifts also led to loss. The suitcase, for example, was never found, nor was a sewing machine that the family used to make clothes when they came to the UK. As a result, new objects, as well as new stories, became important in the telling of the stories. As well as engaging with the timescales attached to objects, as we conducted the interviews, the places the family had traveled to—New York, Kuwait, Indo-China—were important, as the story of the suitcase describes. We found that the experience of migration led to new stories being told. When families migrate across diasporas, for example

from Pakistan to the UK, they carry stories with them, but different stories are then told in the new space, the new "home." New identities have to be forged within new neighborhoods and new identifications created. These identifications and narrative connections are often mediated through objects. Miller (2005, 2010) has argued that material objects are significant in carrying the meanings of the home along with them. Many of these histories remain or are lost in the postcolonial diaspora spaces. In the interviews, the families recreated those historical spaces and provided a detailed account of the place they left behind, its fields and houses, in Pakistan, and the new place, Rotherham, and the changing neighborhood, Ferham, they lived in. At the end of the project, the family left the area, as it had changed again, and they no longer felt they belonged in that neighborhood, as they had become more affluent and could afford to move on.

Likewise, space was both very close and very far, as objects circulated across the spaces between Pakistan and Rotherham, and then, crucially, were lost/misplaced and therefore unavailable for the exhibition and had to be replaced from the museum collections (Pahl and Pollard 2010). Time and space emerge as "emic" categories, that is, time and space were constructed anew in the course of the interviews and within narratives of identity. Long timescales are evoked, of the partition of India and the colonial history of Pakistan, and within this the stories of joining the army or working for the police force in Hong Kong; but at the same time, shorter timescales came to the fore, such as an interest in football and wrestling. Timescales got close to the present day as well as reached back to the 1920s and 1930s. Things got lost in the process of translation across time and space.

TRANSLATING OBJECTS

The process of placing objects in the museum exhibition further shifted their meanings. The space of the museum engaged with these identity transformations, and the process of curating the exhibition brought the relationship between space, place and identity to the fore. As one of the project researchers said:

> To me it was a heritage project—about identity—it was normalising and bridging perceived gaps about what these people want and how they go about their lives. I think things like the children showing their favourite football team and wrestlers, the images in their bedrooms, and the stories of the uncles who worked in the Hong Kong police force and working for the navy, and the armed forces, in Pakistan this was about the commonwealth. The family were keen to explore their New York connections—J was always talking about it. In terms of tracing ancestry, for Asian families how difficult would that be. Ferham families, to me, is the beginning of the "who do you think you are," like the television programme (laughs). (Pahl *et al*. 2009)

At the heart of the Ferham Families project was a focus on heritage and on commonalities, between the families and the community they lived in. There was also a spatial dimension to the project. The curator, together with Zahir Rafiq, created a space in which these contested identities coexisted. The museum exhibition could be described as a "contact zone" (Clifford 1997). The process of curating the exhibition became one of creating identities anew:

> Rather than thinking of identities as having clear edges and as trying to point out what is persistent or coherent about them across time or space, we will come to think of them more as endlessly in the process of creation—as defined not so much by a bounded sense of "difference" but the endlessly deferred Derridean "différance"—or as "travelling." (Macdonald 2003: 4)

Through the work of the curator and the artist, working closely with the family members as they brought their objects in for display in the glass cabinets, the museum exhibition became a space where new kinds of discourses could be articulated.

In Lefebvre's (1991) work on the production of space he argues that, "*(Social) space is a (social) product*" (1991: 26; emphasis in the original). In his work, the production of space is seen as in process and lived through spatial practices. Space can be broken down into three categories (1991: 40):

1. Perceived space, that is spatial practice
2. Conceived space, that is representations of space
3. Lived space, that is representational space

Representational spaces are, "redolent with imaginary and symbolic elements, they have their source in history—in the history of a people as well as in the history of each individual belonging to that people" (Lefebvre 1991: 41). Representational spaces are spaces that the imagination seeks to change: "Representational space is alive: it speaks" (1991: 42). Here, I apply the concept of representational or lived space to the museum exhibition we put together. Just as the interviews produced complex, sometimes conflicting, narratives, the exhibition that was co-curated by family members produced a contested space, echoing Lefebvre's idea that "the act of creation is, in itself, a process" (1991: 34). The idea of "the production of space" and also the idea of space that imagination seeks to change becomes relevant (Lefebvre 1991). The museum exhibition as a newly created space was able to showcase these experiences of "difference" and articulate and represent, in Clifford's (1997) words, the "contact zone" between these identities. We saw the exhibition as a space of production, a space that was produced, and conceived as a way of representing objects through stories in new ways. This spatial reconfiguration centered particularly on identity narratives:

> Museums, precisely because they have been so implicated in identity work and because of their more particular articulations with the kind of identities that are argued to be under threat, are significant sites in which to examine some of the claims of identity transformation. (Macdonald 2003: 6)

The exhibition was therefore a constructed space, one that in Witcomb's (2003) words could be described as "polysemic." It represented identities anew and placed objects in new configurations in relation to each other. For example, a child's copy of the Koran was placed next to an action figure (Figure 5), and a football shirt placed alongside some special gold jewelry.

In discussions with the children, they described how a pair of gold earrings was important alongside a Harry Potter book. They juxtaposed the new and the enduring with ease. The family represented their identities to the Rotherham visitors within this space, which itself reconfigured identities through the representation. One of the team said that the educational value of the exhibition was huge:

> I believe that an extremely positive picture of the local British Asian population was painted. There was considerable evidence

Figure 5
Action man.

> presented of their experiences, hopes and ideals. The family's contribution to the community across generations was there for all to see, as was the family's firm belief in the benefits of a good education, strong family bonds and generosity of spirit. We went in one day, and the teachers from the local secondary school were using the space, and it was their second visit and it was a really diverse range of kids and it was really important for those families and those kids—it sent a really strong message. (Pahl *et al*. 2009)

This observation also showed how the families created the exhibition for the future as well as for the past. The space of the exhibition and the narratives we collected, then, challenged and rearranged settled ideas of time and space. In the process of collecting the stories, timescales became closer and then moved further apart. Objects, too, became infused with value and then became less valuable, associated with long-running family stories and then lost. Space was reconfigured in the process of curating the exhibition and the co-constructed space offered new visions of new generations and their interests, from action figures to the Koran. Children from the third generation of families settled in Rotherham could find their place in the exhibition and recognize some of those continuities and discontinuities as new connections were made in the display cases.

BOUNDARY OBJECTS

In the process of doing the interviews, it was clear that the stories attached to objects shifted in relation to time and space and played different roles in different situations, becoming, as it were "boundary objects" (Lemke 2000: 281). The concept of heterochrony was also played out in linguistic markers of the names for objects and their meanings in different places. Ruksana would refer to objects that belonged to a generation just before her: "When you get married you also have duvets and they are generally made of silk or velvet, and they are hand-sewn, they were at that time hand-sewn, now they are not, the cotton inside is all from the local fields" (interview, Ruksana).

The duvets were frequently mentioned by Ruksana and her mother as something that they brought with them to deal with the very cold winters. However, none were to be found for the exhibition, and the family concluded that they must be in Pakistan. They were variously described as "duvets," "blankets," and also "coats," indicating how difficult the actual object was to represent in English, and its untranslatability as a term from Pushto (the term in India and Pakistan is *ralli*—quilt). An important aspect of these duvets was the material they were made from, cotton, which was grown on Ruksana's father's land:

> He decided he wanted to grow cotton so he grew his own cotton and then it came … from the cotton they made … these blankets,

> it wasn't actually wool, it was this very thick kind of fabric that was very warm, it wasn't like cashmere, very similar, you see, and we have got several of those still, it had some embroidery on the side, hand-done as well, nobody has [them] actually and I think he made one for all the boys and one for himself, we hardly ever go in winter anyway. (Interview Ruksana)

Here, Ruksana describes the process by which the cotton was grown—the well that enabled the cotton to be grown then created the opportunity to make the quilts. However, it was impossible to source the quilts, as they were still in Pakistan. In the exhibition, the blankets were represented by a piece of actual cotton sourced from a local mill and Ruksana kindly donated her wedding outfit.

The sewing machine seen in Figure 6 was not one that belonged to the family but came from the museum's own collection since the family could not find it, despite Ruksana being sure that she still had it somewhere:

> Mum sewed herself. She used to make dresses for me and everything, she'd crochet, embroider and sew, learnt everything at school … she had a sewing machine. It is a Singer one and it was bought when my brother … when he was born dad bought mum the sewing machine as a present. We still have it somewhere. (Interview Ruksana)

This object, which was not found, represented the longer timescale of migration, since it was not possible to buy clothes for the family when they arrived in the UK, as there were very few shops that sold Asian-style clothing. The sewing machine was useful, as it bridged this gap and as a boundary object was useful in the context of migration.

POLYSEMIC OBJECTS

In the display cases ephemeral objects had prominence alongside highly "valuable" ones. In Figure 7, a wedding dress, from a different family, is shown with a little ornament, a peacock (front of the cabinet), that had actually been purchased by a woman from one of the families in the exhibition at a school fair about three weeks before the interview. It was sitting on her mantelpiece when I interviewed her, and it was included, along with her wedding dress, as a valued object in her own display cabinet.

In the process of doing the project settled notions of value were disrupted. Objects thought to be valuable (gold jewelry) were replaced with objects valued for their sensory appeal (gold elephants). These objects were "polysemic" (Witcomb 2003) in that they spoke with many voices. They created new kinds of resonances when placed in an exhibition. As Tolia-Kelly suggests, such material objects operate as prismatic devices which refract migratory landscapes and

Figure 6
Display case on the theme of textiles.

biographical experiences so that "textures in the home become connecting points to past landscapes," arguing that "home for migrant groups is a transitory experience" (Tolia-Kelly 2004: 284–5). Home cultures, then can be seen as not settled but "travelling" (Clifford 1997). Objects themselves have traveling names. These objects, translated across diasporas, from Pakistan to Rotherham, and then reified through the process of creating the museum exhibition, being placed in glass cabinets for display, created new kinds of spaces for discussions to take place about postcolonial identities. The timescales associated with these objects were connected more to the

Figure 7
Peacock and wedding dress.

subjective encounters with the objects, their sensory properties, than with the actual objects' historical timescale. Many objects were lost and some remained in Pakistan, such as the cotton blankets/duvets/ *ralli* quilts or coats. Stories had long timescales attached to them (the shoes with gold hidden in them); however, new stories emerged that also took hold and were important to the families (Ruksana's take on home decoration). The peacock had little significance, but within the wider context of the case it became part of a shared aesthetic (Tolia-Kelly 2004) that made sense across the objects in the case.

At the heart of this project was an attempt at reconfiguration of identities in a postcolonial context (Ali *et al*. 2006). On the website designed by Zahir Rafiq, these complexities were described in images.

The designer's vision as an artist held these complex in-between identities, through the images, presented in the flash presentation of objects falling through space, traveling across nations and across neighborhoods. What the Ferham Families exhibition tried to do was to look again at objects and timescales (gold watch, gold elephants) and recast them in the context of changing identities and changing locations for the families. Space became something that was questioned within the exhibition, and settled notions of identity could then be reconfigured and reexamined. Public spaces like museums and art galleries are places where this kind of work is possible. But the other dimension of the project was its potential for educators and as a form of heritage (Littler and Naidoo 2005). As Zahir Rafiq said, many Asian families do not have the same access to public records and historical accounts that the mainstream communities have. He mentioned that "Z (one of the family members) said, this is for his children, what greater gift can you give them than this exhibition and the website?" The project team was delighted when the local community school visited not once, but twice, for the children to learn about British Asian families. Heritage projects such as this can then interrogate identity narratives and create new narratives in new spaces, such as the exhibition created at the Cartwright Hall in Bradford of South-Asian material culture (Macdonald 2003). The re-forming and reconstruction of archival space that records South Asian home cultures has emerged as an urgent priority coming from this project.

REMEMBERED OBJECTS

Learning from the process of co-curating the objects with the families has involved understanding how there is a way in which the process of remembering both collapses and also telescopes timescales when confronted with material culture, and in conversation with objects. Connerton (2009) warns of the problem of both collective amnesia and a process of forgetting in order to screen out the complexity of the social world. His argument is that memory depends upon a "stable system of places" (2009: 5), and faced with the shifting nature of space, as a consequence of mobility and migration, these memories of migration were fractured through generations and, in this case, represented in the form of an artwork that itself represented a lost suitcase. Further, Connerton (2009) has argued that with the elimination of biography concomitant with the shifts in economic activity the grand meta-narrative of history is disrupted. The new, ruptured biographies of migration and displacement have replaced that settled experience. Following this, the objects described above—the *ralli* quilt, or duvet, the gold-sprayed elephant or dowry, the peacock or wedding dress—are both modernist carriers of intergenerational values and at the same time related to postmodern icons of ephemeral value linked to the concept of "bling" and gold spray, the new and evolving aesthetics of the home.

When reconsidering the dataset through this lens, it appears to be a refraction as well as reflection of this process, of both modernity and change, as well as a play upon gold and quilts and decoration. By placing home objects in the context of a museum exhibition the objects acquired a different kind of status, through the process of translation and recontextualization. The process of producing the exhibition produced new kinds of meanings, for new generations, in new spaces, and by pulling apart settled notions of timescales attached to objects the generational shifts could be listened to. Memory, and the spiraling process of remembering, going back to the Pashtun regions but looking forward to redecorating a bedroom, made sense of the stories in a way that was both in time and out of time (Ricoeur 1980). The regeneration of neighborhoods requires this binocular vision, to go outwards, and to move inside and outside experiences, allowing for new shapes and new timescales to be acknowledged and take hold, in the process always listening for new stories to emerge. Expanding the timescale attached to objects also expands the spatial scale and takes account of migrations and shifts, such as the partition of India as well as shorter timescales like everyday aesthetic decisions around home decoration.

Humans experience the world of material culture that then structures their sensory experiences of the world (Miller 2005; Pink 2004). Objects themselves can operate in a dialectical relationship to narratives, as they are made visible within narratives and are renamed in different stories (Hurdley 2006). Objects, then, are dialogic connectors with social memory in postcolonial contexts (Tolia-Kelly 2004). This project has shown how, using Bourdieu's (1977) theoretical framing, the habitus can be transformed through migration and that transformation can be found in the names given to objects. The timescales attached to objects also shift with that transformation. Lemke's insight that we know more about social development over relatively short timescales and much less about activities and processes that last over multiple lifetimes (2000: 287) gives us an insight into the telescoping of much analysis of social situations. The concept of heterochrony alerts us to this conundrum and can help an understanding of how gold can be identified with a long timescale (dowry) and a new phenomenon ("bling"). Home cultures can then be understood as being "traveling" or "on the move," in the process of undergoing further transformations and dislocations. Once objects are linked both to longer as well as shortened timescales, they can be seen as prismatic devices, as Tolia-Kelly (2004) has described, that evoke in complex ways the traveling spaces of "home." Museums play a role in recreating these remembered spaces, but then have to reengage and represent these spaces anew. The juxtaposition of objects in this exhibition both unsettled conventional concepts of "value" but also pointed to a link between objects, between gold elephants and jewelry, and thus painstakingly reconstructed differently situated memories within glass cases.

REFERENCES

Ali, N., V. S. Kalra and S. Sayyid (eds). 2006. *A Postcolonial People: South Asians in Britain*. London: Hurst & Co.

Appadurai, A. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press.

Bakhtin, M. M. 1981. "Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel." In M. Holquist (ed.) *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 84–258. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Ballard, R. 2006. "The Current Demographic Characteristics of the South Asian Presence in Britain: An Analysis of the Results of the 2001 Census." The Centre for Applied South Asian Studies. www.art.man.ac.uk/CASAS (accessed April 6, 2006).

Basit, T. N. 1997. *Eastern Values, Western Milieu: Identities and Aspirations of Adolescent British Muslim Girls*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Bourdieu, P. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Trans. R. Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, P. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. and L. Wacquant. 1992. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Campbell, E. and L. E. Lassiter. 2010. "From Collaborative Ethnography to Collaborative Pedagogy: Reflections on the Other Side of Middletown Project and Community-University Research Partnerships." *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 41(4): 370–85.

Chukuwudi Eze, E. 2008. "Language and Time in Postcolonial Experience." *Research in African Literatures* 39(1): 24–37.

Clifford, J. 1997. *Routes, Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Connerton, P. 1989. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Connerton, P. 2009. *How Modernity Forgets*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. and E. Rochberg-Halton. 1981. *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Objects and the Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Douglas, M. 1991. "The Idea of a Home: A Kind of Space." *Social Research* 58(1): 287–307.

Fentress, J. and C. Wickham. 1992. *Social Memory: New Perspectives on the Past*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Holland, D., W. Lachicotte, D. Skinner and C. Cain. 2001. *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hoskins, J. 1998. *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Stories of People's Lives*. London: Routledge.

Hurdley, R. 2006. "Dismantling Mantelpieces: Narrating Identities and Materializing Culture in the Home." *Sociology* 40(4): 717–13.

Knights, D. 2006. "Passing the Time in Pastimes, Professionalism and Politics: Reflecting on the Ethics and Epistemology of Time Studies." *Time and Society* 15(2/3): 251–74.

Lefebvre, H. 1991. *The Production of Space*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
Lemke, J. 2000. "Across Scales of Time: Artifacts, Activities, and Meanings in Ecosocial Systems." *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 7(4): 273–90.
Littler, J. and R. Naidoo (eds). 2005. *The Politics of Heritage: The Legacies of Race.* London: Routledge.
Macdonald, S. 2003. "Museums, National, Postnational and Transcultural Identities." *Museum and Society* 1(1): 1–16.
Massey, D. 2005. *For Space*. London: Sage.
Miller, D. (ed.). 2001. *Home Possessions: Material Culture behind Closed Doors*. Oxford: Berg.
Miller, D. (ed.). 2005. *Materiality*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
Miller, D. 2008. *The Comfort of Things.* Cambridge: Polity.
Miller, D. 2010. *Stuff*. Cambridge: Polity.
Pink, S. 2004. *Home Truths: Gender, Domestic Objects and Everyday Life*. Oxford: Berg.
Pink, S. 2009. *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. London: Sage.
Pahl, K. and A. Pollard. 2008. "'Bling—The Asians Introduced that to the Country': Gold and Its Value within a Group of Families of South Asian Origin in Yorkshire." *Visual Communication* 7(2):170–82.
Pahl, K. and A. Pollard. 2010. "The Case of the Disappearing Object: Narratives and Artefacts in Homes and a Museum Exhibition from Pakistani Heritage Families in South Yorkshire." *Museum and Society* 8(1): 1–17.
Pahl, K, with A. Pollard and Z. Rafiq. 2009. "Changing Identities, Changing Spaces: The Ferham Families Exhibition in Rotherham." *Moving Worlds* 9(2): 80–103.
Ricoeur, P. 1980. "Narrative Time." *Critical Inquiry* 7(1): 169–90.
Samuel, R. and P. Thompson. 1990. *The Myths We Live By*. London: Routledge.
Savaş, Ö. 2010. "The Collective Turkish Home in Vienna: Aesthetic Narratives of Migration and Belonging." *Home Cultures* 7(3): 313–40.
Shankar, S. 2006. "Metaconsumptive Practices and the Circulation of Objectifications." *Journal of Material Culture* 11(3): 293–317.
Tolia-Kelly, D. 2004. "Landscape, Race and Memory: Biographical Mapping of the Routes of British Asian Landscape Values." *Landscape Research* 29(3): 277–92.
Werbner, P. 1990. *The Migration Process: Capital, Gifts and Offerings among British Pakistanis*. Oxford: Berg.
Witcomb, A. 2003. *Re-Imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum*. London: Routledge.